



FAQ's

Beekeeping

Frequently Asked Questions

The following questions were put to our President, Peter Hutton in June 2014 and below are his answers:

How many hives can I have in one place?

- The limit of hives (colonies) in one place is limited by the supply of food (pollen & nectar), water, propolis and the number of other colonies (unknown) in the area, all based on a three mile diameter.
- How many hives can I have in a garden 40ft x 60ft?
- Between two and six given the aforesaid answer is understood.
- How many hives should a novice beekeeper start with?
- One although many master bee keepers will propound two. This allows egg transfer should one colony become queen less.

- How much honey will my hive produce?
- There is no accurate answer. It is all subject to the following: no swarms departing, the bees being healthy, there being plenty of nectar, no drought or bad weather to hinder the bees. Also the colony reaching maximum strength in advance of a main flow & there being ample supers on the hive to afford the bees to store the nectar until it is ripened into honey. A surplus might be 20 lbs, it might be 150lbs, 2 colonies might achieve 60lbs surplus each, and 6 colonies might only achieve only 20 lbs each in the same area.
- Locating hives & which direction should they face?
- In nature bees have to take what they find. Solitary bees always look for as near South facing as is possible. Honeybees should have protection from mid day sun, half my hives face South a third East, some West and some any which way.
- Can & do queens sting?
- Yes queens do sting and repeatedly since their sting is smooth.
- Frame spacing in supers and brood nests?
- Brood frames have to be spaced at maximum of 1 ½” and a minimum of 1 3/8” centres. Super frames can be spaced from 1 3/8” to 1 5/8” any wider and the bees will build additional combs in between. For most hive types, 11 to 12 frames is the preferred number to prevent propolis build up between the frame edges. Close up the frames tightly and if necessary, use a dummy board to prevent the bees building bridging comb, at one end.
- How do I clean up used equipment?
- Cleaning equipment is subject to material: wood can be scorched; plastic might be steamed cleaned or sanitised with Virkon S. Washing soda solution should be used on hive tools between inspections of each hive.
- How do I prepare the hive for winter?
- Ensure bees have 60lbs of stores, fit mouse guards, fit rigid wire frames to keep off wood peckers. Treat for varroa at the end of summer and again with oxalic acid during a brood less period in the winter.
- What weight of honey will get my bees through the winter?
- Subject to *Apis mellifera* sub species 40lb to 60lbs. Plus 10 lb of pollen.
- I have dead bees in front of the hive in winter?
- Sure there will be dead bees outside of a hive, you need to know why? If you do not have the ability to dissect and examine them then send a sample to the NBU at York, there will be a charge.
- How far do foragers fly?
- Up to three miles.
- How far do drones fly to mate?
- Up to ten miles.
- How far do queens fly to mate?
- As far as is necessary to reach a drone assembly area.

- Queen excluders? Do I have to use them?
- No but you will find they produce brood up through the central combs instead of right across the brood area consigned to the queens' use by humans, contrary to their natural instinct.
- Symptoms of Queen less bees?
- No eggs or larvae, no queen cells used or torn down which indicates the possible presence of a virgin. Queen less bees make a distinct hum, run about rather than remain content and tend to be aggressive when inspected. To confirm queenlessness either add a comb of eggs or as I do a small piece of comb with eggs between the top of two brood combs, making sure the cells face vertically so the bees can draw queen cells downward.
- How often should I re-queen?
- These days annually or at least biennially.
- What's an inner cover for?
- To prevent brace comb between the uppermost box and the roof thus making the roof irremovable.
- What's the best breed of bees?
- How long is a piece of string? Unless you are breeding bees under strictly isolated conditions or using artificial insemination (which I studied in 1994 at the Hessen Landesanstalt, Kirchain, Germany) there is little chance of you breeding an ideal bee. It requires serious co-operation between beekeepers, co-operation of that sort is not a British trait.
- What precautions should I take if I am given a swarm? Isolate the swarm, check it regularly for ailments, do not feed it immediately so that its' honey is used up in the first couple of days of building wax comb, thereafter feed it to get all foundation drawn.
- Why are there bees 'bearding' on the outside of my hive?
- Simply, because of external heat, volume of bees, lack of super space and a young queen, too late for the bees to swarm and survive.

Answers provided by our President, Peter Hutton - June 2014

Some after-thought questions.

Q. How much does a bee weigh?

A. On average, a bee weighs a tenth of a gram.

So a winter cluster of about 10,000 bees weighs about 1 Kg. So be aware, if a swarm contains 20,000+ bees a sudden 2Kg load dropping into your container can catch you unawares!

Q. How much honey does one bee produce?

A. The average honeybee will make one-twelfth of a teaspoon of honey in its lifetime.

Q. What is the size of a honey bee?

A. On average, from 12 to 16 millimetres (about $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{5}{8}$ inch for workers. Queens and Drones are longer. All bees only need a 6mm entrance slot.

Q. What is the habitat of the Honey Bee?

A. It is believed honey bees originated in tropical climates, so a forest environment is probably their original habitat. But since Honey bees have been kept by humans for thousands of years, today, you can find them all over the world in many types of habitats.

Q. What is the expected lifespan of a honey bee?

A. Life expectancy depends on the time of year and the caste of bee. Queens can live up to three to five years. Drones die when they mate or if they have not mated by the beginning of winter, when they are ejected from the colony to die. During late spring, summer and early autumn, a Worker will live only about 6 weeks. When born, Workers serve as nursery workers for some 2 weeks. After that they collect nectar and pollen until they die. Workers born in late autumn will live some 4 to 5 months, so that they can keep the Queen warm during the winter months.

More answers to some FAQ's on the web at:

<http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/faq.html>